CHAPTER VI

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This study on "Craft Production and Trade in South Kanara: A.D. 1000-1763" fills in a noticeable gap in the historiography of South Kanara, a region strategically located on the Western coast of Peninsular India. It is undertaken in the larger perspective of the economic history of medieval India. We have tapped both primary and secondary source materials in undertaking this study. Inscriptions, literary sources such as administrative records, foreign accounts, folklore, kadatas and published works in English, Portuguese and Kannada are extensively used. The introductory chapter provides the historical and historiographical backdrop to the present study. This study is both empirical and analytical in nature. While evidences are gathered from all possible sources, these evidences are analysed in the broader historical perspective with a comparative method by drawing parallels wherever possible.

From A.D. 1000 to 1763, South Kanara was ruled by different rulers like Alupas, Hoysalas, Vijayanagara and Keladi. Except the Alupas, all others had their political headquarters outside South Kanara. Political and administrative control of these powers on the peripheral region of South Kanara was relatively lesser. Nevertheless, these rulers showed considerable interest in safeguarding the polity and economy of South Kanara, for, it was economically important for them. South Kanara had several ports like Mangalore, Basrur, etc. and they played a dominant role in the promotion of trade. Besides the fall of Alupas saw the rise of several feudatory chieftains. For example, the Chautas of Ullal had become
popular in the political history of the region due to their conflict with the Portuguese. These frequent changes in the politics of the region and lack of strong political rule had set the tune for much of the socio-economic developments in South Kanara.

The economy of South Kanara, as many other parts of India during the medieval period, depended primarily on agriculture. Industrial production or craft production was of secondary importance. Major industries like textiles, oil, coir, sugar, jaggery, etc. which existed during this period had to depend upon the primary sector for the raw materials. Other than these, there existed artisanal activities to a considerable extent. The tools and equipments required for agricultural and industrial production, utensils used in houses, ornaments, stone works, wood works and the like were produced. There was surplus production in agriculture and rice and pepper were exported in large quantities to other parts of India as also abroad. This was not applicable to industry where there was no much surplus production. Moreover, what existed in South Kanara was the domestic industry which was essential to the subsistence economy. The domestic industry and the flourishing agriculture largely co-existed and formed the two basic pillars of the economy of South Kanara. There was no much division of labour expressed in a separation of functions between food producers and artisans.

Our study reveals that there was migration of artisanal communities like Devangas, Padmasalis, etc. from other parts of India to South Kanara. Inscriptions and folk literature frequently refer to the artisanal activities. Textile production was a major industrial activity and it thrived in centres like Kavuru,
Boluru, Basrur, Barkur, Baindur and Karkala. Another notable industrial activity was the production of salt. South Kanara was known for the cultivation of sugarcane and it was used in the manufacture of jaggery and sugar. However, references to sugar production are meagre. Jaggery was not only produced but also exported. Oil production, metal, wood and leather works, masonry, umbrella, hat and mat works were also carried out by artisans belonging to different communities. The society was caste-stratified and each of these activities was traditionally undertaken by the respective caste-people. The sources do not throw much light on the nature and composition of the industrial set up, level of technology and industrial production and distribution. On the basis of the sources consulted, it may not be wrong to say that the level and techniques of production were of traditional nature and did not develop well. The rulers did not show much interest in patronising the artisans and industries did not develop on par with agriculture.

It was chiefly due to the agrarian surplus that trade began and developed in South Kanara. Agrarian products like rice, coconut, arecanut, spices like pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, chilli, etc. were grown and exported to different destinations like Goa, Bombay, Malabar and to foreign ports like Muscat, Aden, etc. These items were also imported into South Kanara from the Western ghat region and the hinterland first, and then exported to places of demand. Cloth was imported even from far off places like Surat, Bombay and Cuddapah. Thus it was basically entrepot trade that thrived here. Ports like Basrur, Barkur and Mangalore acted as trans-shipment ports and entrepot trade
ports. The rulers took keen interest in the promotion of agriculture and trade as they brought much revenues to the State. This trend developed more during the Vijayanagara and Keladi periods. Taxes were imposed on the shops. Transit and Custom duties were levied on goods involved in trade.

Due to the increased trading activity, trading centres emerged during this period. Udyavar, Barkur, Mangalore, etc. emerged as major centres of trade. The presence of itinerant traders was conspicuous. Besides them, many groups of local traders emerged. They generally belonged to the dominant Hindu group, namely, the Gowda Saraswat Brahmin caste. There were also Muslims, Jews and Jains who carried out trade. Foreign traders like Chinese, Arabs, Portuguese, English and the Dutch were also active in the mercantile activity of South Kanara. Their presence added new dimensions to the magnitude of trade. Some of these foreign traders entered into matrimonial alliances with the native women and thus strengthened their position to involve in active trade. The Arab traders got indigenised and settled in Kasargod, Kumbla, Mangalore, Mukka, Bhatkal and other coastal areas. They had contacts with their counterparts in Malabar. The Navayats were important traders who settled in places like Sirur, Baindur, Gangolli, Basrur, Hangarkatte, Malpe and so on. There were Indian trade centres in Arabia. The trade was both internal and external. Both these components were indispensable for the development of the economy.

The prevalence of exuberant trade is indicated by the existence of large number of trade or merchant guilds. Most prominent of them were nakhara, settikara, hanjamana, elamegalu, etc. They were quite active in the big trade
centres. They not only protected their socio-economic interests, but also played the role of intermediaries in settling disputes, and had strong influence on the administration. They also caused the construction of temples, gave grants to religious institutions and managed the finances and lands of some of the temples. Their role as financiers or moneylenders is particularly notable. The heads of these guilds emerged as the new socio-economic elites. They played an important role in the socio-economic transformation of the region.

There was the emergence of urban centres like Basrur, Barkur and Mangalore. The town administrative system had evolved. Towns like Barkur and Basrur had several keris. Artisans who carried out different productive activities organised themselves and lived in their respective keris. Trade, religion and politics were the major factors in the process of urbanisation.

The existence of trade necessitated trade routes. There were land and sea routes used in inland and overseas trade respectively. South Kanara and its several busy ports were connected with the upghat regions through land routes. Similarly the rivers of this region facilitated inland trade. The ports facilitated foreign trade. The means of transport was primitive. In addition to human labour, bullock carts were used extensively in the transport of goods. In contrast to this the water transport system was more developed, particularly from the beginning of the 16th century thanks to the arrival of the Portuguese and other foreign ships. Native crafts were in use all over the coast from the ancient times onwards. The problem of piracy had to be faced by the sea traders and robbery was common on
roads passing through the forests. Selection of quality wood and shipbuilding developed as an art.

Apart from the urban centres and well developed commercial areas, there were regular fairs held daily or weekly in different parts of South Kanara. These fairs facilitated the exchange of goods between the local populace. The festivals held at religious institutions provided an opportunity for fairs and commercial centres like Subrahmanya, Dharmasthala, Udupi, etc. centred around these institutions had evolved.

The rulers issued coins of gold, silver and copper of different denominations from time to time. These were used in the process of exchange of goods. The barter system was also prevalent on a large scale.

The arrival of European traders in South Kanara during the sixteenth century and later was of great significance in the history of trade and commerce. The Portuguese, Dutch and the English traders were prominent. However, the Portuguese played a predominant role in the mercantile field. There was competition between the Portuguese and the Dutch in securing maximum merchandise from South Kanara. Later the English also joined them. The Portuguese were the first to represent Europe here as in India, and because their political headquarters in Goa was relatively closer to South Kanara, they were quite actively involved in trade. Further as Goa was a grain deficit region, they had to maintain close contact with the granary of the Western coast, namely, the Kanara region. Though they procured rice from the Konkan and Malabar areas, the import of Kanara rice was indispensable for Portuguese Goa. Of course they
traded in spices like pepper, cardamom, etc. also. The Portuguese supplied horses to the Vijayanagara rulers. They entered into treaties with the Keladi rulers. These treaties had provisions relating to their political and commercial relations. When the Portuguese were able to impose their conditions on the weaker rulers of Keladi, the stronger rulers of Keladi resisted and they turned the table against the Portuguese. They were able to assert themselves politically because they realised the Portuguese dependence on Kanara for rice, pepper and other goods. They could even bargain with the Portuguese for higher price. The Portuguese had issued *cartazes* to the merchants. Many Kanarese merchants held *cartazes* issued by them. The Portuguese had set up their fortress-factory system in the ports of South Kanara and they facilitated the growth of towns and provided a stimulus to urbanisation. They also promoted Christianity here. The arrival of the Dutch and English traders in addition to the Portuguese, increased the bargaining power of the Keladi rulers. The European factor in the Kanara trade favourably affected the economy of this region. There was favourable balance of trade. The quantum of merchandise increased by leaps and bounds. When there was increased demand, it acted as a catalyst in the area of agricultural production.

South Kanara from A.D. 1000 to 1763 saw the growth of craft production, agricultural production and trade. There was proliferation of artisanal communities and craft goods. New mercantile classes emerged. The economy of this region was linked with the rest of India and some other parts of the world. The economic condition presented pre-capitalist tendencies.